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MADAME DE STAËL

BY FLORENCE LEFTWICH RAVENEL

ONE of the subtlest of recent critics, Mr. Paul Elmer More, has suggested a new theory of the feminine genius, which has at least the merit of setting the woman's gift clearly and sharply apart from that of the man. From his analysis of Christina Rossetti—a wonderfully penetrating and sympathetic study, by the way, of that rare and elusive spirit—Mr. More concludes that the peculiar passiveness of her mental attitude, her joyless acquiescence—the “everlasting yea” with which she meets the hard decrees of Fate and the tyrannous demands of life—make of this singer of lovely dirges the most perfect and satisfying type of genius in woman.

And though, at first sight, this judgment might seem but an unwarranted generalization of the critic's own fastidious and academic taste, yet there are not wanting intimations that his view is shared, more or less consciously, by men of quite other sorts and conditions. For man, with his urgent impulses and passions, has always loved to think of woman as in all things ideally his opposite—the embodiment of that dream of serenity and peace, of unruffled calm of flesh and spirit, which he is destined to long for and to seek after but never to find.

After all it would seem that this is a question of fact and not of theory. Our query is not, Does this idea satisfy a deep craving of the masculine heart, and establish a more perfect symmetry, so to speak, in our conception of the respective qualities of men and women? but, Is it *true*? *Have* those women who have graven their names most deeply in the heart of the race—have they been great by virtue of this spirit of resignation—of a passive acceptance of the established order of things and their own part in it?

Mr. More's estimate of Christina Rossetti needs, I think, no qualification. In her, as in her brother, the mingling of

two different strains has resulted in a talent of unique distinction. For sheer depth and purity of poetic inspiration, combined, as this is in her best work, with a complete mastery of her peculiar medium of expression, I know not her peer among women. Nor is she quite alone of her species. There are others who, set apart by the law of their own nature from the noise and hurry of the active world, have wrought out for us in solitude and silence the substance of their vision of life. Of Eugénie de Guérin we must all think—another creature of twilight and shadow—of strange renunciations, of unexplained but unquenchable tears! But even so, dare we affirm that this their spirit of “surrender to the powers of life” is indeed the most elemental note of the feminine genius? There is surely another type of greatness, another feminine attribute, to which at least an equal place belongs. That quality, I mean, which has made of the woman, in soul as in body, from the beginning of time, the “Mother of all living.” Joan of Arc, with her “visions” and her “voices” for the night; her sword, her armor, and her intrepid front for the noonday; St. Teresa rousing herself from rapt contemplation of ineffable mysteries, to intrigue, dispute, contrive like the wildest Jesuit for the privileges of the order she had founded—what were they, after all, but incarnations of the spirit of motherhood—protecting, brooding; by turns tender and terrible, fulfilling toward a larger world, with its greater needs, an office not unlike that of humbler mothers everywhere.

One might, indeed, reproach the woman with the lack of those very qualities in which Mr. More finds her peculiar strength. A certain incurable haste and fever, an incapacity to sit apart and wait until the time is ripe; a perennial immaturity and lack of finish—in these her critics have been wont to see the fatal weakness of woman’s work. But I should be bold to claim for the truly representative women of all ages a great unselfishness—an obsession with the wrongs and sorrows of mankind, a passion to help and succor, which many faults and imperfections cannot surely discredit or outweigh.

In other words, it seems to me that genius in a woman is more nearly allied to and dependent on personality than in a man; so that it is very much harder for her to be great in spite of *herself*—of her character—than for him. Goethe’s well-reasoned, deliberate, and unrelenting egoism and cold-

ness of heart are unthinkable in a woman—allied as they were in him with a real benevolence, unerring judgment, and a truly God-like vision of men and things. No, we must be content to have on the one hand a Christina of Sweden, or on the other a St. Teresa—we shall find no combination of the two.

And therefore the woman of past times is, as a rule, much harder to know than the man. Few women have left to posterity direct and tangible proof of their intellectual and artistic achievements. For the most part, their fame comes to us as an echo—a rumor passing down from age to age by the fragmentary and uncertain witness of men, whose praise or blame takes on, in the lapse of centuries, a strangely hollow and artificial tone. The great masterpieces of men stand, as they must, in their own strength, but, lacking these, who shall reproduce for us the magic of the woman's look and voice and gesture?—that once set throbbing the heart and brain of whole generations—and now, alas! is dead even as they are. With few exceptions the woman's genius survives, if at all, only as it is reflected in the hearts and imagination of men.

Among the few women whose literary productions have claimed, and perhaps deserved, a permanent place by the sheer force and originality of the ideas they convey, no one can be compared, I suppose, with Germaine de Staël, born Necker, the daughter of Swiss parents, though herself born in Paris, 1766.

This little Protestant girl was born into a strange world. Audacious theories, bold speculations, are not in themselves alarming, but here was a society which stood ready to translate its wildest dreams into every-day fact. It was this child's lot to be born when and where the current of modernism was strongest and most turbid. It was the France of the Encyclopedia, of the *Contrat Social*, and of the famous salons; the France still of Voltaire and Rousseau, and soon to be the France of Robespierre and the "Terror." And the words "born into this world" may here be taken almost in their literal sense, for at four years old the small Germaine was already, we are told, a well-known figure in Mme. Necker's salon, and the vision of the tiny, quaintly dressed baby, seated among the guests on her own low stool, is not more humorous than pathetic, especially when the little image one day opens its mouth and launches full in the face

of the most distinguished person present, so runs the story, the ominous question, "M. de Marmontel, what, pray, do you think of love?" Even in childhood this child thought too much of love. The romantic attachment of M. and Mme. Necker was proverbial in frivolous, cynical Paris—the more so, perhaps, that Mme. Necker's character was to the last degree antipathetic to the French, and a dream of married happiness such as her parents had known haunted Germaine throughout her whole career, an ideal which had about it always a taint of the morbid—not to say of the mawkish. Not for nothing had she been a daily witness of the excessive self-effacement of the wife, of the laborious, almost anxious tenderness of the husband. It was all admirable in its way, no doubt, but it was *their* lot; it was never to be hers, though the memory of it, the longing for it, were perhaps the underlying cause of some of her most fatal errors in the conduct of her own life, as well as of the tone of melancholy and disillusionment which is never far below the surface of her most enthusiastic mood.

That famous saying of hers, "Glory can never be for a woman anything save a splendid mourning garb, worn for the happiness she has lost," is a striking bit of picturesque phrasing. It has served as text for many an exhortation against the ambitions of women, for whom "glory" was the last and remotest of perils. But the worst of it is that the maxim is not *true*. It was not true for Germaine Necker; for glory, *real* glory, remains after all, as Renan has said, "that which in this world is least likely to prove to be vanity," and at her heart's core no one knew that better than she. The life of the affections alone would not have satisfied her; and how can we picture the woman who for fifteen years steadily resisted the will of Napoleon himself—how can we fancy her spending her days in contented obscurity, in the shadow of a husband, however excellent and devoted? She was much better—nay, much happier—in her high and courageous loneliness.

Moreover, no woman ever lived who would more thoroughly have enjoyed and profited by the modern freedom and rational independence of her sex than Germaine Necker. Her claims to good looks or physical attraction of any sort were of the smallest, though her biographers would fain persuade us of the contrary by dwelling upon the power and beauty of her great, dark eyes, upon her shapely

hands and arms and stately carriage. If she could have been set free once for all from that inordinate appetite for admiration, for approbation, which laid her bare to every random shaft of ridicule and malice, many rough places might have smoothed themselves, many crooked paths grown straight before her feet.

But theoretically, at least, she adhered all her life to her mother's maxim: "It is the man's place to brave public opinion, the woman's to submit to it." Mme. de Staël remained always the "great lady" of genius.

To the mere looker-on, the France of the eighteenth century might seem pre-eminently the woman's age and country. No doubt they wielded a real power—those brilliant women of the great salons who made and broke reputations and careers with an epigram. But all this influence and popularity were not without price. They were bought by the most unscrupulous intrigues, political and social, on the one hand, and on the other by compromises of honor and dignity and decency, which even after two hundred years fill one with a sort of physical disgust. This was Germaine Necker's world, and from its moral contagion she could not wholly escape, any more than from its false and artificial standards of taste and its rather hectic intellectual activity. But in great issues, when her own passions were not involved, in the decision of great questions, this woman's courage, her will to look the truth in the face, her far-seeing, incorruptible resistance to the current that was sweeping France (and after her all Europe) into the grasp of a military despotism—all these things belong to a spirit divinely free—we may almost say, to the only free spirit left in a Europe where Goethe lived and practised his bows to the Grand Duke, and in due time even made graceful speeches to the great tyrant himself.

Advanced views prevailed in the Necker circle, but they did not apparently have any influence upon the parents' plans for their daughter's establishment. Germaine—already very much of a person—brilliant enough, disquieting enough, to give wiser parents pause—Germaine was married at twenty to the Baron von Staël Holstein, Swedish Ambassador to France. A well-bred, well-disposed, but somewhat light and insignificant sort of person the baron, whose Protestantism, together with his rank (the latter appealed strongly to Mme. Necker), seem to have

been his chief recommendations; but the marriage was probably quite as happy and respectable as the majority of such arrangements in that time and world. There was never any open scandal, and, though after a number of years a separation was agreed upon, the motive seems to have been financial—De Staël was a terrible spendthrift—rather than moral. The three children were brought up to respect both parents, and finally, when their father was old and ill, his wife went to him and nursed him faithfully till he died. So much her respect for tradition and public opinion could accomplish, but Germaine's heart was never in this marriage, and hers was not a heart to be left out of account with impunity. For she was a creature of the tempest, such as the eighteenth century, the age of Reason, loved to bring forth, in mockery of its own pretensions—one in whom a strong will, religious scruples, habits of self-control and of calm judgment were overborne and swept away in an instant by an onrush of tumultuous emotion.

She had one or two transient fancies in her youth, and then, when her hour was fully come, she fell a victim to one great and most unhappy passion which laid waste her heart and dragged its slow and poisonous length across the eight best years of her life. It was not an abject or degrading passion; its appeal was not chiefly to her lower nature; but none the less surely, for the sort of perverted exaltation that disguised it, did this untoward love sap the very springs of her inner life.

Germaine de Staël's long connection with Benjamin Constant is one of the famous love affairs of history as well as of literature, as famous as that of De Musset with George Sand, though very unlike it. One side of this story—the man's—is narrated at length and in minute detail in *Adolphe*, Constant's only novel, which is a masterpiece of impersonal, detached self-analysis and self-revelation, and leaves the reader divided between a somewhat breathless admiration of the author's unexampled candor and psychological insight, and a sort of horror of the coldness and aridity of the nature laid bare. On the woman's side the record is not less plain for him who has eyes to see. In the imaginative works of Mme. de Staël's maturer years love appears, not as the innocent idyl of youth, nor yet as the more or less culpable pastime of men and women

of the world. Love for her is henceforth tragedy. It is the chronicle of the woman's always losing battle—of the woman struggling single-handed with tradition and prejudice—above all, with the incurable feebleness and inadequacy of the man's soul. She judged (as we all judge) by what she knew. A tone of almost monotonous depression and discouragement pervades her two once famous novels, *Delphine* and *Corinne*. But whenever this woman could escape from the narrow range of personal loves and hates, hopes and fears, when she could make good her entrance into the larger world of thought and ideas, how swiftly did the key change! Then her tears dried of themselves in the white heat of her righteous wrath; she shook off her pose of half-conventional melancholy, and went forth joyously to take her part in the great "liberation war of Humanity."

Woman has been always generous, it seems to me, in according to man everything that he desires to fulfil his own ideal of himself. But it must tax her patience sometimes, one would think, to see him calmly, without scruple or remorse, gather with a sweep of his arm into his own portion all the nobler qualities of the soul—simply by calling them masculine. One would scarcely apply that epithet to Mme. de Staël, to her character, or to her achievements, unless indeed there be no other word to describe strength, frankness, courage, and a noble disinterestedness in the pursuit of truth; and in her these qualities seem not coldly intellectual, but rather emanations from a great generosity and benevolence of nature, a deep-lying faith in humanity which even the horrors of the Revolution could not discourage, and which made life worth while in the darkest hours of anarchy or despotism. In her last days Mme. de Staël said that she had had three great loves: God, her father, and Liberty. And it may well be that as she grew older these three seemed more and more to merge themselves in one great benignant and wonder-working power—a glorious trinity which spoke to her ear with one voice, forbidding her to despair of mankind or of the world.

In the early years of the Revolutionary period, Mme. de Staël's salon of the Swedish Embassy in the Rue du Bac was at the height of its vogue, the most brilliant in Paris. Men of every nation, of every shade of opinion, were gathered there, and absolute freedom of thought and speech was the distinguishing note of their intercourse. But the

hostess was the real center and inspiration of those memorable reunions, of which many reminiscences have come to us, but no adequate description—none at least that conveys to us even faintly the effect produced by Mme. de Staël's conversation nor the qualities which set her as a talker apart from all others.

A dark-skinned, thick-lipped woman, without beauty, heavy alike in feature and figure, and with a style of dress that betrayed a love for the picturesque rather than a true Parisian's sense of harmony and grace, she yet possessed a wonderful and compelling charm. A magic spell, it seemed, that for the time transfigured her whole being and held her hearers breathless and enthralled; while for those who came habitually under its influence this conversation of hers grew to be an urgent need, a sort of element or atmosphere without which their spirits languished and grew faint. Indeed, she was very unlike, in many ways, the typical hostess of a salon in the eighteenth century. For most of those shrewd and clever women the holding of a *bureau d'esprit* was a matter of business. They were seeking success in some form, literary, political, social, and always with a purely personal, selfish aim. But here was one woman to whom the Revolution was a sacred thing, a great and splendid revolt of the human spirit against the powers of darkness. She believed in the might and efficacy of ideas and in the essential goodness of human nature, and at least in her earlier years she was a true daughter of that age to which Voltaire had taught freedom of thought and contempt for tradition, and Rousseau the return of a primitive state of innocence unspoiled by the artifices of civilized life.

Much, therefore, that might seem perhaps, in this cult of the idea and of the spoken word, like mere intellectual fustian was to Mme. de Staël the very stuff of which life is made. She was capable, we know from many witnesses, of exquisite graciousness, of infinite delicacy and tact in reassuring and fostering the timid, and she gloried in the strength of a worthy antagonist. But, after all, conversation was to her verily the sword of the Spirit, worthy the best efforts of the loftiest minds. And so, at the close of one of those famous evenings of hers, when the subject had been tossed from lip to lip among the speakers and played upon in turn from every angle of vision, it was her wont,

we are told, to gather up the scattered threads of the discussion and hold the great thought for a little while in her own hands, as if for a final shaping and polishing, that no aspect of it might be lost or obscured when it went forth to do its work among men. Thus, without bitterness or contention, did she set her mark upon it—seal it with her own seal.

Upon this magnanimous if somewhat unpractical group of theorists the awful events of the Reign of Terror fell with a shock as of a crumbling world, and for a season the most optimistic were dumb. This, then, was the outcome of the rule of Reason, such the first fruits of “liberty, equality, and fraternity!”

With Mme. de Staël compassion was responsive to every call, and for her it was never a sterile emotion, but a veritable passion to help and save all whom her arm could reach, without respect of person or party. Her position as wife of the Swedish Ambassador made her, for a time at least, comparatively safe in Paris, and she used her official immunity, her old prestige as Necker’s daughter, and one whose liberal sympathies were well known—she wore all these pretexts threadbare—and her woman’s wits, her social experience, and tact besides, to snatch from death one and yet another human creature whose only claim upon her was his desperate need. Again and again did she penetrate to the secret councils of the Convention to plead for some life and exhaust every resource in her appeals to Robespierre or Tallien—and rarely, it must be added, in vain. But the “Terror” went its way to its appointed end, and after a year of unwilling absence Mme. de Staël returned to Paris to confront her great enemy.

Back to Paris, still a city of waking dreams, to whose generous enthusiasm all things seemed possible, came also the great Realist. He came in a blaze of military glory followed by his victorious legions, and the legend of his Italian campaigns, the first canto of the great epic of European conquest, was well fitted to inflame the quick imagination of the French, in whom love of glory has always been the one enduring passion.

To Mme. de Staël Napoleon’s unique and essentially Latin genius appealed at the first with extraordinary force. In him she believed all the great principles of the Revolution were to triumph, were to receive their final

consecration, in the glorious peace which a liberated France was to impose, by his hand, upon the world. She was young, too, and a woman who had no reason to distrust her own powers of attraction—powers so hard to divine to-day behind the crude colors and harsh outlines of her pictured face and form. It may very well be that in her patriotic zeal there mingled some alloy of personal ambition and vanity—in fancy she saw herself perhaps the guiding star of the great Ship of State, the inspiring muse of the hero, and through him the arbiter of Europe. But very soon her faith began to falter—partly, no doubt, because of Napoleon's rough and tactless rejection of her advances, but more and more from a sort of dumb terror and distrust which the great man's demeanor was well fitted to arouse in one like Mme. de Staël. She ascribes her growing antagonism to her father's example and teachings, but it goes deeper than that—rooted, no doubt, in her half-conscious intuitions, her unreasoned perception that this man was the predestined Arch-Enemy of ideas, the great Opportunist, whose deep and scornful knowledge of men had taught him to rule them through their weakness and meanness rather than by an appeal to a soul in which he did not believe. These two were foes inevitably and irreconcilably; any truce between them must have been hollow; and the woman, not without protests and appeals, finally accepted the situation.

Mme. de Staël has been blamed for her perpetual and often rather querulous complaints and lamentations over her exile and her adversary's implacable hate. But less has been said of the note of almost childish petulance in Napoleon's chidings and reproaches of Mme. de Staël. So inconceivable to him was the force of moral convictions that he seems never to have doubted that this troublesome woman could, if she only would, make it up with him and his régime at any time and live good and happy ever after. Once assured, however, that he could neither cajole nor compel her, he determined to be rid once for all of a hostile influence he did not overestimate.

With the issuing of the consular edict which banished her to a distance of forty leagues from the capital begins for Mme. de Staël the long period of exile—so dreary, wearing, and humiliating to her proud, ardent nature; so refining, chastening, and developing to her mind and soul. Freed

at last, against her will, from the absorbing interests of Paris and of her own people, she had leisure to become aware of the great world-forces working themselves out in other ways among other races of men; and it may be said to Mme. de Staël's great glory that hers was the first French mind (and the list of those who come after her is not long) which lifted itself to a European point of view. Her half-foreign ancestry, her Protestant faith, even her abhorrence of the régime in power in her own country—all these may be counted for something in her detached and impartial attitude, but these are not enough by themselves. She was really seeking truth and light, and could by no means find rest in lies, however specious. For her *liberty* meant first of all the freedom of the spirit, and how could she fail to perceive that in unprogressive, phlegmatic, prince-ridden Germany men's souls were often freer than at home? It is this peculiar openness of mind and singleness of heart that give distinction to her views. She was not without vanity, as we know; her early training had fostered an almost morbid craving for excitement and social diversion, and her hatred of Napoleon no doubt made her often unjust both to him and to France—for which, nevertheless, she longed with inextinguishable desire. But over and over again was she offered all the privileges and rewards which the Empire had to bestow for some trifling concession—a few words celebrating the Emperor's latest victory, a paragraph of flattering prophecy on the occasion of the birth of the Prince Imperial. And she always refused, while so many of her ancient comrades, sometime apostles of Liberty, found their account in compromise with the powers that were! Constant, Talleyrand, and other smaller men found, at one time or another, some middle ground on which their old principles and present interests could walk without unduly jostling one another. But Mme. de Staël could see only one way, and that led her now across the Rhine. And this reluctant pilgrimage was the climax and consummation of her career. By the mere act of going deliberately into remote exile she made it plain that, while Napoleon might blockade England, bully Germany, and threaten Russia, his power came to a halt at the door of one will, one conscience.

Weimar, whither she betook herself, note-book in hand, as fast as the clumsy coaches of the time and the manifold

delays incident to travel would permit, was emphatically a man's world; the woman's part, even in courtly circles, was restricted to that of listener, or at most of unobtrusive accompanist to the masculine performer. But in every situation into which life had led Mme. de Staël hitherto, she had always stepped into the first place as by divine right. The flare of the limelights was dearer to her than sun, moon, and stars, and—a point of still greater importance—she was used to the almost exclusive society of men, and liked it. Here for her was an interesting programme, days and nights abounding in stimulus.

It is hard to be quite as sorry for Mme. de Staël as she seems to expect when we recall the men with whom, during her sojourn in Weimar and Berlin, she spoke familiarly face to face. Besides the Grand-ducal family of Weimar, who appear unaffectedly to have loved and admired her, she made acquaintance with the brothers Schlegel, with whom her intercourse ripened into close and intimate friendship, with Fichte, Schelling, and Schiller, and finally, after some solemn coquetting on the great man's part, with Goethe himself. And in spite of some national and personal prejudice and misunderstanding they all in the end came to like and esteem her sincerely. What these Germans saw in her first was her limitless craving for discussion, a somewhat disconcerting appetite for this people of heavier brain and slower speech; but then they saw, too, her transparent simplicity and honesty of mind, the piercing clearness of her intellectual vision, and her absolute generosity and good faith. Both in Weimar and in Berlin Mme. de Staël was a success.

Weimar was very well as an interlude, but it could be for her no "continuing city." She was drawn back to France as by invisible cords, although the Emperor, far from forgetting her in her long absence, seemed to exercise his ingenuity in devising against her new measures of petty and harassing persecution. Her home at Coppet was very lonely now, since her best friends no longer gathered about her there, held back either by their fears or by direct prohibition and penalty. And so once more she took up her dreary march—up and down, to and fro, through that Europe which year by year contracted about her, until it seemed that soon no spot of free soil would remain where she might rest the sole of her foot. More and more closely the Em-

peror's net enmeshed her, till at last her thoughts turned in all seriousness to the great free Republic across the sea as a final refuge for herself and her beloved children.

The fall of the Empire in 1814 summoned her back to Paris, but it was in no festal mood. In spite of all she had said and written in dispraise of France, she was far too true a Frenchwoman to rejoice in a personal deliverance that meant defeat and humiliation to her country, and it was quickly brought home to her that the enemies of Napoleon, whom she had indoctrinated and encouraged in her exile, were, under a very thin veneer, the enemies of France and of the liberty that she loved. Her personal glory was at its height—kings and potentates consulted and treated with her as with a European Power, but her strength was broken, if not her spirit. For years Mme. de Staël had suffered from a lingering and painful disease. In 1817 in Paris, surrounded and consoled by her children and her friends, she died, in the full maturity of her powers and at the height of her fame. She is buried beside her parents at Coppet, the home of her exile, and the place which more than any other is bound up with her fame and her active and agitated career.

But Mme. de Staël's books! the row of substantial volumes that bear witness to her industry, her many-sided interests, and her one-time popularity—they have certainly grown old and become difficult reading—had grown difficult, indeed, before the last of that generation had passed away which had been nurtured in her ideas. Sainte-Beuve, protesting loyally against the neglect into which she had fallen even in his day, prophesied that she would have her revival; and men may indeed go back to her; but it will scarcely be as they go back to Pascal and Bossuet, or even to Voltaire and Rousseau—not for pleasure, nor for that subtle heightening of the emotions, that sense of the enlargement of the bounds of life, which is the ineffable gift of the great masters.

We cannot reproach her with the absence of an independent and original system of philosophy. In this respect Voltaire was but little better furnished than she, and Châteaubriand very much worse. She was the child of her age. She utters the great doctrines of the eighteenth century—its theories concerning liberty and progress, of the

freedom of the will and of the goodness of human nature. She gives them to us unchanged in essence, but touched and vivified by that infusion of warm and generous emotion which she called *enthusiasm* and which remains the most characteristic note of her teaching. Critics and historians have done their best for Mme. de Staël when they have spoken of the general "nobleness" and "elevation" of her writing. The truth is she has no sustained style, her books no structure, in the technical sense. She has eloquence sometimes, often emotion; often also she finds vigorous and original utterance for isolated reflections or sentiments. But in narrative, exposition, or description of any length or scope she falls into abstract, inaccurate, and commonplace forms of expression; her thought, her image, reaches us without sharpness of outline or vividness of color, the whole effect dulled and blurred by an instrument not finely tempered enough for its task. The supreme gift of "the Word" was not hers, and among all French authors of anything like her importance she is probably the least read.

Her earlier works the "Essay on Rousseau" and that on the "Passions," and her first real book, that on *Literature*, in which she applies to the history of letters the favorite doctrine of the eighteenth century, the theory of perfectibility, or, in other words, of the perpetual and uninterrupted progress of the human race toward perfection,—these essays are all full of acute personal observations and fruitful suggestions; but to the modern reader they are made almost inaccessible by their confused and incoherent arrangement and their heavy, unattractive style. The popularity of *Delphine* waned early, but the fame of *Corinne* is attested by the praises and the tears of two generations. For *Corinne* is Mme. de Staël's ideal of herself, and the story of that brief, beautiful, and most sorrowful career, her ill-starred love and untimely death, are told with a tragic sincerity and poignancy that strike home even yet through all the clumsy guide-book setting.

Despite its limitations, despite the strong anti-Imperial bias which often obscured her judgment of men and events, the *Considerations Concerning the Revolution*, her last and unfinished book, is certainly Mme. de Staël's maturest and soundest political utterance, though in originality and general interest it does not equal the book *On Germany*. That

a woman and a Frenchwoman at the opening of the nineteenth century should have ventured upon an interpretation of modern Germany remains one of those anomalies which confront us now and then to remind us of the futility of cut-and-dried rules and classifications, and of all "pigeon-holing" in general. The work is a remarkable and, on the whole, measurably successful *tour de force*, and, though it is not, I suppose, a great book, it could have been written only by a great woman. In the light of subsequent events her characterization of the German people is, of course, inadequate—based upon insufficient knowledge and rash generalization, and as a whole it is now little read. Yet its pages abound in just and generous appreciations, incisive criticisms, and keen moral insight, as valid to-day as when they were first penned. And, indeed, turn where we may among the writings of the French critics and moralists of the nineteenth century, our eye falls inevitably upon the name and the thoughts of Mme. de Staël—thoughts grave, wise, profound as the utterance of an ancient oracle, illumined sometimes by a lightning flash of intuition that penetrates to the heart of things, with a thrust so keen, an aim so sure, as to have all the effect of inspired vision.

Time is the only just judge. His verdict is always vindicated in the end.

To leave no consummate and immortal literary monument, after a whole life spent in the single-minded service of truth and freedom and beauty! What harsher sentence could fall upon this aspiring, earnest, ardent spirit, so full of confidence in herself and in the value and urgency of her message? And yet let us not rashly pity her. For even setting aside the direct political influence which she exerted in her own time, there is not one of all the men and women, her peers, who lived their full and fruitful lives in those stirring, heart-searching times—not one, I believe, save only the great Emperor himself, who is to-day as intensely alive in the world as Mme. de Staël.

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